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Office of University
Communications

August 2, 2016

Kathryn Manning ('18) Grateful for Study Abroad Opportunity

Perched on the edge of a platform about 11 stories high, Kathryn Manning ('18) had a choice to make. Should she jump and soar on a Tarzan swing through the valley below the Arenal volcano in Costa Rica? Her friends from Gardner-Webb University went first and waited below. She swallowed her fear and took a leap of faith.

“I was pretty terrified to do the Tarzan swing,” Manning recalled. “I had been sick the day before, so I wasn’t sure it was the best idea. But I knew I would regret it if I didn’t. I have a fear of heights, so just climbing the platform was an adventure in itself. I think the biggest sense of apprehension comes from waiting at the top of the platform, before you are let go. I was strapped into a harness, but I had to wait at the edge for a while before I could swing. Plus, I was told not to hold onto anything. Swinging over the valley was an indescribable feeling. After it was over, I was so happy that I did it. I had a sense of relief, but also a sense of ‘I want to do this again!’”

Manning’s excursion was part of a four-week study abroad trip offered by the GWU Department of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures. Much like leaping off the platform on the Tarzan swing, the Boiling Springs, N.C., native stepped out of her comfort zone to experience the Costa Rican culture.

“I’m incredibly grateful to Gardner-Webb and the world languages department for offering this opportunity to study abroad,” Manning reflected about her first trip out of America. “I loved the fact that we were trusted enough to make our own plans, take our own trips, and go on our own adventures. It helped me learn more about the language, culture, budgeting, and public transportation. I was able to go up an entire level in Spanish in the time I was there. Beyond that, I learned about intercultural interaction. I believe that all of these things combined will help me as I further my education and eventually get a job.”

The students stay with host families, attend Spanish classes in the morning and have the afternoons free. Immersed in the culture, they build confidence in their ability to communicate. “I was so nervous about having to live with strangers for an entire month, but my host parents made me feel right at home,” Manning shared. “The first afternoon we

got there, the host family took four of us students to a family birthday party. It was so awesome to be able to experience that within the first 24 hours of being there. I improved my Spanish, because that's basically the only way that I could communicate with my family."

During her stay, Manning faced other circumstances that tested her language skills. "There was one particular day when I got sick at school," she related. "I had to ask the school receptionist, who didn't speak English, if she could call a taxi since I was sick. She understood, and I rode home in a taxi by myself for the first time. I was able to tell the taxi driver where my host home was located, and why I was leaving school early. It was really neat to know that I could speak the language and understand him. Not only was I saying the basic survival things, I was actually having a conversation with him."

Manning is double majoring in communications and Spanish. "I've changed my major several times, deciding on communications, because it encompasses everything I love—writing, interviewing and video/photography," she asserted. "I've actually known that I wanted to do something with Spanish since high school. I took a couple of Spanish classes there and realized that I had a knack for it. I know Spanish is a good second language to know, and I thought pairing it with communications would be great."

Manning is no stranger to Gardner-Webb. Her grandfather was a faculty member and Dean, her parents are alumni, and her father is on staff. But when it came time to choose a college, Manning took the time to see the University through the eyes of a student. "The student-led tour gave me an entirely new perspective," she divulged. "It was no longer 'that college across the street.' I could actually see myself as a student coming here for the next several years."

Gardner-Webb professors have encouraged her to excel in her majors by creating classroom environments that build relationships. "It's obvious that the professors actually care about you as a person, as well as a student," Manning assessed. "They want you to succeed and get the most out of the classroom experience. In Spanish 101, Dr. Lorene Pagcaliwagan made coming to class every day a joy. She had a great outlook on life and learning, and she's a very strong Christian role model. In my English 102-Honors class, Dr. Jennifer Buckner opened my eyes to a new way of writing. She fostered a lot of great discussions between classmates."

Besides improving her Spanish language proficiency and writing techniques, Manning has developed skills that will help her succeed in life. "I've learned a lot about time management and making sure that I give enough attention to each one of my classes," she explained. "This will definitely be beneficial for me as I continue my education and down the road, when I start my career. I've also come to appreciate the general education classes."

Although I might think that I'm not interested in a particular subject, I can still learn something while I'm taking that class. I believe this characteristic—being open to learning—will serve me well in the future.”